

# Fur Trapper Survey 2003-04

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## **Abstract**

An estimate of Wisconsin's furbearer harvest by licensed trappers is used to document the economic importance of trapping and to assist in the management of furbearer species. Sixty-one percent of respondents said they trapped during the 2003-04 season. Trappers used a total of 394,000 sets on 703,000 nights during the 2003-04 trapping season.

## **Methods**

The Fur Trapper Survey was mailed to a sample of 6,000 people who purchased a resident trapping license, or a conservation patron license. The sample was selected from the 2003-04 resident trapping ( $\approx 3,100$ ) and the conservation patron ( $\approx 2,900$ ) license holders who indicated they were trappers. A second mailing was sent to non-respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I questioned trappers on their trapping season including; number and species of furbearers trapped, average number of sets used, number of days spent trapping, total trapping expenses, and number of furs sold in and out of Wisconsin (Fig. 1). Part I also included questions on the hunting of furbearers by trappers. Part II pertained only to beaver trappers and will not be discussed in this summary. Please refer to the Beaver Trapper Report in this publication for this information. Data from all returned questionnaires were entered into the DNR UNIX computer and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

## **Results**

All duplicate responses were removed from the survey pool. Responses were received from 1,781 of 6,000 trappers surveyed. The resulting response rate was 29.7%.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents actively trapped for furbearers during the 2003-04 season. Furtrapper license holders were two times as likely to trap as conservation patron license holders (81% vs. 38%). Conservation patron license holders were twice as active during the 2003-04 trapping season (38%) than they were during 2002-03 (16%). Furtrapper license holders were also more active with 81% actively trapping in 2003-04 vs. 73% during the 2002-03 season. The increases in fur prices are probably somewhat responsible for this increase in trapper activity.

The majority of respondents (32%) trapped in the Northern Region of the state (Table 1). During the 2003-04 season, trappers trapped an average of 34 days. This is similar to the 2002-03 season where trappers trapped 36 days. The average trapper incurred \$253.93 of expenses on such things as traps, lures, gas, and a license. This is very similar to 2002-03 average of \$256.56. The mean number of days spent trapping ranged from 39 to 30 days among regions, while the mean trapping expense ranged from \$218.10 to \$315.61 among regions (Table 2). Statewide, 17% of trappers also hunted furbearers in 2003-04.

When the results of this survey are expanded to the larger population of licensed furbearer trappers, we can approximate that 11,469 licensed trappers actively trapped and 5,062 trappers also hunted furbearers during the 2003-04 season. Roughly 4% of licensed furbearer trappers

pursued bobcat, while 63% pursued raccoons (Table 3). The estimated number of red fox, gray fox, coyote, and raccoon harvested by hunting were 1,612, 260, 10,089, and 52,822, respectively (Table 4). A summary of 2003-04 furbearer harvests and sales can be found in Table 5.

Wisconsin requires hunters and trappers to register all kills for bobcat, fisher, and otter. The official harvest for these species are from registration data, (please see Bobcat, Fisher, and Otter Harvest Reports in this document). The furtrapper survey asks trappers the number they trapped for each of these species. Survey results are not corrected for response bias, prestige bias or animals caught and released. These are obvious, as the harvest estimates for these species from the trapper questionnaire are higher than the registered harvest totals.

Trappers were asked what percent of their conibear sets were water sets or dry land sets. Sixty-six percent of trappers' conibear sets were water sets. Trappers were also asked, of their dry land sets, what percent were blind sets, and natural and artificial cubbie sets. Most trappers that used dry land conibear sets used artificial cubbie sets (47.8%). The next most popular dry land conibear set was a blind set (24.7%). This was followed by natural cubbies sets (12.7%).

Trappers were also asked if they would consider changes to their trapping practices or traps in order to develop more humane trapping systems. Thirty-eight percent said they were willing to do nothing, this was followed by changes to set locations and set-up (22.6%), modification to current traps (17.3%), discontinue use of less desirable traps (11.2%), and purchasing new more humane traps (10.7%).

**Table 1.** *DNR regions where furbearer trappers did most of their trapping, 2003-04.*

Region	# of Trappers	Percent of Trappers
Northern	3,655	31.9%
Northeast	1,317	11.5%
West Central	2,096	18.3%
Southeast	1,146	10.0%
South Central	2,280	19.9%
Unrecorded	975	8.5%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11,469</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2.** *Percent of furbearer trappers that hunted, average number of days spent trapping, and average trapping expenses by DNR region during the 2003-04 trapping season.*

Region	% of Trappers who hunted	Average number of days trapped	Average trapping expense
Northern	14.9%	32.0	\$209.63
Northeast	16.0%	35.2	\$286.03
West Central	19.1%	33.8	\$218.10
Southeast	27.7%	33.0	\$302.02
South Central	21.4%	38.8	\$315.61
Unrecorded	14.3%	30.2	\$247.00
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>\$253.93</b>

**Table 3.** *Estimated number of active furbearer trappers pursuing each furbearer species, and percent of active trappers trapping for each species, 2003-04.*

Species	# of Trappers	% of Trappers
Bobcat	424	3.7%
Coyote	2,248	19.6%
Fisher	2,030	17.7%
Gray Fox	1,090	9.5%
Mink	3,991	34.8%
Muskrat	5,861	51.1%
Otter	3,613	31.5%
Opossum	670	6.1%
Raccoon	7,168	62.5%
Red Fox	2,282	19.9%
Skunk	562	4.9%
Weasel	642	5.6%

**Table 4.** *Harvest of furbearers by trappers who hunted, and total harvest (trapping harvest + hunting harvest) for each of the commonly hunted species during the 2003-04 fur harvest season.*

Species	Hunted Harvest	Total Harvest (Trapping Harvest + Hunting Harvest)
Coyote	10,089	17,837
Gray Fox	260	2,670
Red Fox	1,612	7,743
Raccoon	52,822	214,043
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,783</b>	<b>242,329</b>

**Table 5.** *The 2003-04 fur harvest summary based on responses from licensed furbearer trappers.*

Furbearer	# Caught in Traps	# Sets Used	Total Days Trapped	# Sold in Wisconsin	# Sold out of State
Bobcat	497	1,786	5,782	42	42
Coyote	7,748	22,335	60,336	3,605	1,892
Fisher	2,038	7,650	26,000	661	576
Gray Fox	2,410	10,116	24,629	1,226	1,057
Mink	25,972	55,992	89,744	14,534	9,450
Muskrat	313,627	129,912	124,552	217,689	73,370
Otter	3,275	13,571	68,067	1,398	982
Opossum	38,878	8,224	26,490	9,418	2,051
Raccoon	161,221	110,874	191,992	117,565	32,103
Red Fox	6,131	20,782	55,685	3,171	1,850
Skunk	8,943	5,380	16,723	1,290	645
Weasel	12,061	7,960	13,097	4,630	8,721
<b>Total</b>	<b>582,801</b>	<b>394,582</b>	<b>703,097</b>	<b>375,229</b>	<b>132,739</b>

# WISCONSIN FUR TRAPPER SURVEY

s. 23.09(2)(k), Wis. Stats.  
Form 2300-103 (R 4/04)

Dear Wisconsin Furbearer Trapper:

You have been selected to help gather information on fur trapping. Completion of this survey is voluntary. You can make an important contribution to the future of Wisconsin's fur harvests and trapping activity by taking the time to complete the attached survey. If you did not trap furbearers, simply answer questions #1 and #6 and return the survey. If you did trap, please fill out Part I of the survey. If you trapped beaver, please also complete Part II of the survey.

The information requested from you and other trappers is essential in managing Wisconsin's valuable fur resource. Through your cooperation we can determine catch, trapping success, trapping pressure, and trapper characteristics on a statewide basis. These facts are necessary for a better understanding of how regulations affect your trapping and the welfare of furbearer populations. With your help, the future of regulated trapping as a public service will be assured as we face challenges locally and globally.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey. Reverse the flap on the survey, tape the edge and mail. Using your stamp will save funds for management even though no postage is required to return the survey. *Please reply even if you did not trap this season or were not successful.*

Thank you.

Sincerely,

John F. Olson  
Furbearer Ecologist

PART I.					
1. Did you trap for furbearers in Wisconsin during this season? <input type="checkbox"/> (1) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (2) No			2. In what DNR REGION did you do MOST of your trapping?  <input type="checkbox"/> (1) Northern <input type="checkbox"/> (4) Southeast <input type="checkbox"/> (2) Northeast <input type="checkbox"/> (5) South Central <input type="checkbox"/> (3) West Central		
3. About how many days did you trap?  _____ days trapped					
4. Please fill in all five blanks for each kind of furbearer you trapped in Wisconsin during the past season:					
	Number caught in traps	Average Number of Sets	Total Days Trapped	Number SOLD in Wisconsin	Number SOLD Out of State
Otter	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Muskrat	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mink	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Raccoon	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Red Fox	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Gray Fox	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Coyote	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Bobcat	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fisher	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Skunk*	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Opossum*	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Weasel	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
*If either skunks or opossums were caught incidentally, then put zeros for average number of sets and total days trapped.					
5. Estimate your total trapping expenses for the past season: (traps, lures, gas, license, etc.)  \$ _____			6. Did you also HUNT furbearers with gun and/or dogs during the past season?  <input type="checkbox"/> (1) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (2) No If yes, please give the <b>number</b> of each kind taken: _____ Red Fox    _____ Gray Fox    _____ Coyote    _____ Raccoon		
7. Of the coyotes and foxes that you killed, how many had mange?  _____ Red Fox    _____ Gray Fox    _____ Coyote					
8. Of conbearn traps used, what percent were used as:  _____ % water sets    _____ % dry land sets			9. Of dry land conbearn sets made, what percent were blind sets, natural cubbies, and/or artificial cubbies?  _____ % blind sets    _____ % natural cubbies    _____ % artificial cubbies		
10. In an effort to develop more humane trapping systems, it may be necessary for trappers to consider some technique changes. Please check all that you would consider reasonable:					
<input type="checkbox"/> (1) Change set location and set-up <input type="checkbox"/> (4) Purchase new, more humane traps <input type="checkbox"/> (2) Modify current traps    if modifications can't be done <input type="checkbox"/> (3) Discontinue use of less desirable traps <input type="checkbox"/> (5) None of the above					

Figure 1. The 2003-04 furtrapper questionnaire.